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System in Mound Exploration

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Exploration by the Historical Department of Iowa of the Boone Mound, near Boone, Iowa, April, 1908.

ANNALS OF IOWA.

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

SYSTEM IN MOUND EXPLORATION.

From the advent of the white man into Iowa, the works of prehistoric peoples have elicited interest. They have formed a part of the written and printed comment on the country, and furnished a field for the exercise of healthy curiosity, as well as stimulated a desire for knowledge on this subject. Nearly every one of the ninety-nine counties has its published history and practically all of these contain accounts of local works of the Mound Builders. In different parts of the State and at various times in the course of our development, some serious effort has been made at thoroughly exploring mounds and carefully recording, preserving and reporting their disclosures. Much has thereby been added to our knowledge of these works, and many objects relating to these ancient peoples have thus been put within our reach for study. Many mounds worthy of consideration and of ample authenticity as work of the ancients, have been found vacant as to relics; a fact of value. But the reduction of the soil to the uses of agriculture has done much to lessen the opportunity to record their locations, contours and dimensions. Each year does more, and the time is near at hand when many works will be obliterated unless some systematic work is undertaken for their preservation. The ruthless digging by boys and curious men is not so serious. Results of even careless excavation may be made highly beneficial by prompt and diligent interviews, by the collection of objects and by other exercise of ingenuity.

We believe there is no one who does not wish a systematic exploration of the Iowa mounds. Certain scientists and one considerable religious body especially wish it. Every one is

less desirous of haste than of exactness in exploration and report. All recognize that immediate general beginning or constant work are impossible, but each effort should relate to all others. It is to accomplish the final and sufficient exploration, without loss of effort or opportunity that the Historical Department would urge upon all the adoption of its plan for operation.

Let some body or activity of the State have authority conferred upon it by which it can acquire and hold title, either in fee or for use, upon conditions for proper exploration or preservation. Let it be empowered to confer the privilege of such exploration upon any who apply and who disclose a willingness and ability to explore, record and report results uniformly with those of other exploring ventures elsewhere in the State. Let it guarantee the land owner against trespass during crop seasons and other inopportune times, and against loss of identity of his name with such contributions to knowledge as may result from his co-operation. On the other hand, let it guarantee the explorer against unnecessary expense and annoyance in doing his work. Let it go into the field, locate, prospect, make contour maps and all preliminary preparation where grounds are being disturbed. Let it guarantee the public the maximum of information in quantity and authenticity, and the care and distribution of this information. The result must inevitably be a thoroughness and uniformity of study and a permanence and reliability of exploration and report that cannot otherwise be accomplished surely and inexpensively.

The Historical Department has a standing welcome to many grounds that it must at present forego exploring for want of funds. It has found a universal interest in the work. Local students volunteer ample assistance for preliminary surveys, including the making of topographical charts, maps, borings, and the gathering of facts as to previous excavations. Everything, up to the actual handling of the dirt, and part of the cost of that, is often volunteered. No land owners, and few tenants are found, who object to, or obstruct work, especially with reasonable protection against waste, and assurance of

the restoration of the land surface. Had the Historical Department authority to receive gifts of realty, as it has of personalty, it would be a ready and efficient servant in acquiring and holding for the use of present and future students rights and titles to fields of prehistoric interest. It could then more efficiently perform the duty of retrieving objects that are going from our State to enrich the collections of other States, and information that is disappearing with the first occupants of lands where mounds are situated. It could better assist both owner and explorer in making the most of their respective opportunities with the least of loss and waste.

SOLICITING CONTRIBUTIONS.

A most effective step towards acquiring materials for our collections was that taken by Charles Aldrich when he mailed to patriotic men and women of Iowa the circular given below. The situation today is essentially the same as it was when the circular was issued sixteen years ago, except that acquisitions are now deposited in the fire-proof building of the Historical Department.

HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT OF IOWA.

CHARLES ALDRICH, *Curator*.

Des Moines,.....1894.

This Department was established by act of the Legislature of 1892 for the promotion of historical collections pertaining to Iowa and the territory from which our State was set apart.

The Historical Rooms are in the basement story of the State House, are fire proof, and will be a safe depository for valuable books, files of newspapers, pamphlets, manuscripts, maps, charts, portraits and articles of value, illustrative of the history and progress of our State and its people.

Here it is desired to collect:

1st. A copy of all documents, papers or pamphlets, letters or manuscripts relating to early settlements in any part of Iowa; to the laying out of towns or cities, establishment of counties, changes of boundaries, establishment of or removal of county seats, with *exact dates* in all cases, if practicable.

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